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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6090
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INFO RHHMUNA/USPACOM HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA IMMEDIATE 2328
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE 0354
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS IMMEDIATE
RUEHRO/USMISSION UN ROME IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE

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SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

BANGKOK FOR USAID /OFDA REGIONAL ADVISOR A. DWYER
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PACOM FOR J3/J4/J5
NSC FOR P. MARCHAM

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [EAID](#) [SOCI](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [SENV](#) [EAGR](#) [RP](#)
SUBJECT: WELL-PLANNED EVACUATION MOVES THOUSANDS FROM LUZON
VOLCANO'S REACH

REFTEL: Manila 2583

1. (SBU) Summary. Authorities have evacuated over 40,000 people living within five miles of the Mayon Volcano in southern Luzon, including virtually all residents of the 'extended danger zone'. The level of volcanic activity remains high, but experts do not believe a hazardous eruption is imminent. The Mission Disaster Relief Officer (MDROff) on-site reports that the relocation was conducted quickly and efficiently, a testament to Albay province's successful mainstreaming of disaster preparedness policy. Both the U.S. Peace Corps and the U.S. Agency for International Development have contributed to the province's highly effective disaster risk reduction programs, which serve as a model for the nation and the region. End Summary.

'An Eruption Today Would Not Be a Disaster'

2. (SBU) The Albay Provincial Disaster Coordinating Council (PDCC) began evacuating residents from within the five mile radius 'extended danger zone' surrounding Mount Mayon the evening of December 14, the same day the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (PHIVOLCS) raised the volcano's warning intensity to Alert Level 3. By the morning of December 18, authorities had relocated over 40,000 persons, virtually the entire population of the extended danger zone, to schools and other public buildings outside the zone. Mission Disaster Relief Officer (MDROff) at the scene reports that magma eruptions are dispersing lava in a 360 degree radius around the mountain, not just in the southeast quadrant which is the historical pattern. Thus, Albay authorities are evacuating more people than during previous periods of volcanic activity. MDROff said Armed Forces of the Philippines troops and Philippine National Police personnel are strictly enforcing the no-entry policy around the danger zone, and assisting in forced evacuations. One provincial official noted that 'if it happened today,' an eruption would not be a disaster.

Incentives to Spend Christmas in a Shelter

13. (SBU) Contacts report that the evacuations have proceeded smoothly, and evacuation centers are well-run and organized, with sufficient sanitary and health facilities, and with all evacuees registered upon arrival. Chairman of the Provincial Disaster Coordinating Committee (PDCC) told MDROff that the province is employing an incentive system to keep people in evacuation centers, mainly by distributing five kilograms of rice per family per day. Albay province Governor Salceda added that providing holiday meals, although a strain on the evacuation budget, is likewise necessary to prevent the evacuees from returning home to celebrate the holidays in the danger zone.

14. (SBU) The Consular section continues to monitor the situation by contacting wardens in the affected area. Section staff have yet to receive any inquiries from concerned U.S. citizens. Information collected by the Consular section to date indicates that there are no U.S. citizens among the evacuees. There are no Peace Corps volunteers assigned to the immediate evacuation zone and all in the region are safe and secure.

Scientists Say Volcano Restless but Stable

15. (SBU) PHIVOLCS scientists continue to monitor the volcano, but have not raised the Alert Level from 3 (signifying relatively high unrest) to 4 (intense unrest, hazardous eruption imminent). They

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report an increase in the number of ash explosions and volume of sulfur dioxide emissions, but fewer volcanic tremors than prefigured the last major Mayon eruption in 2006. Lava flows continue to expand and have reached three kilometers below the crater lip. PHIVOLCS Assistant Director Bartolome Bautista told ESTHOff that while he expected the volcano to continue to disgorge lava over the next month, he did not consider a major eruption likely.

Albay Mainstreams Disaster Preparedness

16. (SBU) Albay provincial officials have made disaster preparedness and risk reduction a central component of their economic strategy, with a goal of zero disaster casualties. Instead of relying on contingency funding, nine percent of the provincial budget is allocated to disaster risk reduction efforts. A core element of the zero casualty goal is preemptive evacuation, which in turn depends on both risk and resource mapping, and an effective community warning system. The community outreach component is an innovative public private partnership with a major telecommunications provider, which distributed 15,000 SIM cards to local officials and citizen volunteers, who form the core of the early-warning system.

U.S.A.I.D. Builds Disaster Preparedness

17. (SBU) In response to Typhoon Durian (Reming) in 2006, the U.S. Agency for International Development funded \$1.5 million in livelihood restoration and disaster risk reduction projects in Albay province. In addition to prepositioning emergency equipment and supplies in vulnerable areas, USAID has invested in disaster preparedness at the local level. The agency has worked with municipal and village officials to develop disaster plans, developed low-cost warning systems in rural areas, and trained teachers and students in disaster risk reduction. USAID also funded a \$3.5 million project to construct over 900 typhoon- and earthquake-resistant homes in previously devastated areas.

Kenney